23: Cabello y Robles G-3 (1778-1786) 1961
NO6 Comanche NO6
Eastern Comanche

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A DESCRIPTION OF THE COMANCHE INDIANS IN 1786 BY THE GOVERNOR OF TEXAS*

TRANSLATED AND EDITED BY ODIE B. FAULK

The Comanches first appeared in New Mexico in 1706. By mid-century they had driven the Jicarrilla Apaches from the northeastern region of that province and were devastating the Spanish settlements east of the Rio Grande. Continuing their advance southward, these fierce warriors drove the Texas Apaches back upon the Spanish settlements at San Antonio and below the Rio Grande. Their victory at San Saba in 1758 over the Spaniards, whom they considered to be Apache allies, assured their domination on the plains.

Under the illusion that the Comanches would remain away from the settled areas of their control, the Spaniards determined in 1779 to form an alliance with them with the intent of the total destruction or reduction of the Apaches. Although participation in the American Revolution interfered to some extent with the plan, Spanish officials proceeded, nevertheless, with their efforts to bring the Comanches into an alliance. In New Mexico Governor Juan Bautista de Anza (1778-1788) secured the desired treaty with the Western Comanches (Yamparikas) in July, 1785, and in Texas Governor Domingo Cabello y Robles (1778-1786) achieved the same goal in October, 1785, with the Eastern Comanches (Kotsetekas and Penatekas).

The acting commandant-general of the Interior Provinces, José Antonio de Rengel (1784-1786), desiring information which would indicate whether the Comanche raiders would keep the peace treaties they had just signed, sent the gover-

*Domingo Cabello, "Respuestas qe el Govr de la Prov de los Texas da a las Preguntas que el Sñr Comd Gral de las Ynters le hace en oficio de 27 de Enero de 1786: sobre varios circunstancias de los Yndios Cumanches Orientales," April 30, 1786, Bexar Archives (University of Texas Archives, Austin).

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175 nor of Texas a number of questions about this tribe. A
128 translation of Governor's Cabello's reply follows:

175 **Domingo Cabello: "Answers that the Governor of the Province of Texas Gave to the Questions that the Señor Commandant-General of the Interior [Provinces] asked in a letter dated January 27, 1786, about various circumstances of the Eastern Comanche Indians," April 30, 1786, Bexar Archives.**

FIRST: About Their Customs.

175 According to what is known about this Nation, it is the
181 most brave and warlike of those [tribes] that inhabit the North; and when they have friendship they are very friendly and of a generous mood, and friends of their friends, although delicate in the mode with which they make friendship.
175 They adore very much the skins of animals which they
778 customarily bring with them, and which they fasten on
825 themselves during the encounters of war, so that they will
[726] not be killed or wounded in any manner; and if any mis-
[782] fortune befall them, they attribute it to having given some
[784] offense to this specie of idol, such as not having offered it food or the smoke (*humo*) of tobacco each time they smoke (*fuman*), or that women have defiled the ceremonies which they make use of when they take the pipe in hand. Some devote themselves in this manner to adoring a buffalo hide, others to that of the bear, others to the otter, and others to that of some birds, whose skin, still with its feathers, they
175 use to adorn themselves. Their marriages they celebrate
595 with as many women as they are able to maintain; if someone
462 distinguishes himself in bravery and in actions made against his enemies, or something of a similar nature, some fathers give him even of their daughters, and it is the custom many times for him to marry with the sisters [of his wife]; husbands maintain their women with the buffalo and deer which they hunt; [the women] are obliged to work the meat and [prepare] the hides of the said animals.
175 [The husbands] are so extremely jealous that for very trif-
593 ling motives they kill their women; furthermore, when these mild ones give occasion for it, the husbands treat them with much blindness and harshness, as if they were slaves.

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SECOND: What Reciprocal Trade Has One Village With Another? 175 438

The commerce and trade that one village has with others is that the Eastern Comanche transport the horses which they acquire in their wars and robberies to the villages of the Western Comanche, that are known by the name *Yumbarioas [Yamparikas]*, who are the ones that sell or barter rifles, powder, shot, lances, cloth, pottery, and knives which they acquire from the *Canse, Quita, Quirate and Aguaés*; these are also intermediaries in the commerce of buffalo hides, with and without hair, which they work and dress very well. 439

THIRD: What Strength Has Each One? 175

With respect to the strength of each settlement it is not possible to ascertain the number of people that compose them, nor of those of the other villages because they are accustomed to subdivide according to the way they accommodate themselves to the terrain in which they exist and the bounty of the hunt of the buffalo, on which they maintain themselves. Because of the shortage of firearms, they keep their strength gathered with the caution with which they always live; they never situate themselves in a place that will be very uncomfortable, but in which they will be able to be sheltered from their enemies, always having little [scouting] parties circling to observe whether or not they are being attacked. They have the system of wandering from one place to another without maintaining themselves in a fixed locale, and in such manner they plant no crops. They maintain themselves only from the flesh of buffalo and deer, and some roots like sweet potatoes that are abundant in the territory in which they travel. 621 224 175 721 621 175 221 [241] [262]

FOURTH: What Territory Do They Ordinarily Occupy? 175

The Rancherias of the Eastern [Comanche] Indians are 131 [133]

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175 customarily situated across the river that some call the
131 *Colorado* (Red) and others the *Rio de la Empalizada* which
133 flows to Natchitoches in order to empty into the Mississippi; from their settlements [on the Red River] they move about to the headwaters of the Brazos de Dios, which are one hundred leagues apart from one another; in this interval they are accustomed to make their residence at a place they call
175 the *Gran Salina* [Large Salt]. There they provide them-
439 selves with this commodity in order to barter with the
317 *Taboayazes* [*Taovayas*] and *Guachitas* [*Wichitas*] who, because they lack salt, esteem it very much.

175 FIFTH: What Are the Names of the Captains That
622 Govern Them?
624
[643] The names of the captains that I have been able to acquire notice of are in the First Class, El Cota de Maya, or Camisa de Fierro[1]; the second, Cabeza Rapada. Those of the Second Class are El Lobito, El Sorrillo, Guiracaraco, El Guaguanguas, La Boca Partida, El Español, El Surdo, and El Manco. I have not been able to inquire the names of the other three or four who are of the second class.

SIXTH. What Distinguished Those in Authority?

[643] The chiefs with the most authority and following known among the Eastern Comanche Indians are in the first class, el Camisa de Fierro, or Cota de Maya, and in the second, la Cabeza Rapada, there being ten or twelve that are between those of the second class and subject to the two aforesaid [first class chiefs].

175 SEVENTH: How Did They Gain Their Authority, by
643 Election or by Inheritance?
623
555 The command and superiority established by the two

[113] 1. For further details about Cota de Maya (Coat of Mail), also called
[551] Ecueracapa (Leather Cape), whose Comanche name was Contatanacapara, see Alfred B. Thomas, *Forgotten Frontiers* (Norman, 1932), 296-328.

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aforesaid chiefs has been by election and vote of all the Eastern Nation; [the two chiefs] having [already] made themselves very distinguished in the encounters of war with their enemies, by which they gained the esteem of all their Nation and the following which they have; in the councils that they hold, always their vote decides, and the rest of the Nation does not oppose them.

EIGHTH: What Is the Personal Character of These Chiefs and the Influence That They Have, and Are Able to Have in the Negotiations of the Nation?

As the two great captains previously mentioned have not come to this presidio of San Antonio de Béxar, the governor has not been able to learn their character, but if the experiences of the six lesser captains that have come to the ratification of the peace treaties [are a basis for judging], they are of a generous spirit and have manifested more friendliness to the Spaniards than the captains of the other friendly Nations of the North. It has been observed that the retinue of the chiefs [of the Nations of the North] look at the [Comanche] chiefs with more respect and give them more subordination than they do their own chiefs.

With respect to the rest of the observations that the governor has made of this nation, he has come to understand that it is necessary to treat them with much friendliness and consistency, for they are, in short, of a very sensitive nature and do not accommodate themselves to any harshness. Without compromising the dignity of his office, it is indispensible [that the governor] manifest toward them all love, and make them believe in the governor, for them to behave satisfactorily toward [the Spaniards]; for if they begin to lack confidence, they take many precautions and manifest their vexation; in virtue of which it is necessary that a governor of the Province of Texas, whom they call Father, have the gravest finesse and precautions in dealing with the said Indians, in order to keep them always

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pleased and content. Through that means and by presenting them with those trinkets which they are accustomed to receiving, by which means he will be able to obtain peace treaties, trade, and communication with them, constant and truthful. That is how much the governor has been able to inquire and investigate the character of this Nation.

Royal Presidio of San Antonio de Béxar, April 30, 1876.

DOMINGO CABELLO.